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Islamizing peoples with Afghani-'Fundamentalism'? A Critical Review of Bangladeshi Newspaper

Islamisasi masyarakat dengan Fundamentalisme Afghani? Tinjauan Kritis terhadap Surat Kabar Bangladesh

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Abstract

The Taliban's return to power after 20 years, following the withdrawal of US troops, has been a pivotal global event. This study critically examines how two leading Bangladeshi newspapers, The Daily Star (DS) and Prothom Alo (PA), represented the Taliban's resurgence and the US withdrawal. It explores how these newspapers legitimised Western superiority by endorsing the authority of the US and invading forces, reflecting vested media interests. The study argues that both newspapers reinforced an Orientalist perspective, portraying the West as superior while framing Islam and Muslims as threats. By analysing news reports and editorials, this research highlights how Bangladeshi media dehumanised and marginalised the Afghan people while favouring foreign intervention. Ultimately, the study reveals that these newspapers contributed to an exclusionary discourse, constructing an "Other" within their narratives, thereby perpetuating Western ideological dominance in media representation.

Keywords Afghanistan, Taliban, Islam, Media, Orientalism, Elite agenda

Abstract

Kembalinya Taliban setelah dua dekade, pasca-penarikan pasukan AS, menjadi peristiwa global penting. Studi ini menganalisis representasi kebangkitan Taliban dan penarikan AS dalam dua surat kabar terkemuka Bangladesh, The Daily Star (DS) dan Prothom Alo (PA). Penelitian ini menemukan bahwa kedua media tersebut mendukung otoritas AS dan kekuatan kolonial, memperkuat superioritas Barat dan memperlihatkan bias media yang tersembunyi. Dengan pendekatan kritis terhadap berita dan editorial, studi ini mengungkap bagaimana DS dan PA memperkuat perspektif Orientalis, menggambarkan Islam dan Muslim sebagai ancaman, serta mendiskreditkan rakyat Afghanistan. Kedua surat kabar lebih berpihak pada intervensi asing, memperkuat narasi eksklusi dan membentuk citra "Liyan" terhadap Afghanistan. Studi ini menunjukkan bahwa media Bangladesh berkontribusi pada pelanggengan dominasi ideologi Barat dalam representasi global.

Keywords Humanisme, Pandangan Dunia, Manusia, Tuhan

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Introduction

In most Western mass media and political discourses, Islam and Muslims have been associated with a negative image (Said, 1978, 1982; Poole, 2002; Richardson, 2004: Kabir, 2008). For example, they are identified as terrorists and against the interest of the West, which is argued as "rituals of degradation" (Hall, 1992). The ritual degradation, however, is the result of orientalist discourse which has been serving interest for the Western superiority that provides less responsibility for the West while they would have to be marked as invaders or oppressors (Hall, 1992; Richardson, 2004[1]In contrast, Muslims are being perceived and represented as barbaric, against human rights and against the civil world— for example, suppressing women and being involved in fundamentalism (Ahmed, 1992; Poole, 2002; Kabir, 2021).

Therefore, the dehumanization of Muslim images appears through social institutions including mass media. Western media being the main agents of the dehumanized image of Islam and Muslims that appears through the construction of media image[2]The negative image can be the outcome of falsification[3], disinformation (Kellner, 2010, 1996) and propaganda[4]; Kellner, 2010) against Islam and Muslims. Therefore, the mass media construct a distorted image of Islam and Muslims. Kabir and Bourk[5]argue that there are cases that the negative construction of Islam and Muslims is not a responsibility of the Western media per se as they are heavily dependent on foreign news sources.

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[1] Rashid, Ahmed. *Taliban: militant Islam, oil and fundamentalism in Central Asia*. Yale University Press, 2010.p8

[2] Poole, Elizabeth. "Reporting Islam." (2002): 1-240.p22

[3] Stabile, Carol A., and Deepa Kumar. "Unveiling imperialism: Media, gender and the war on Afghanistan." *Media, Culture & Society* 27.5 (2005): 765-782.p770

[4] Islam, M. Rezaul, Niaz Ahmed Khan, and Rajendra Baikady, eds. *Principles of social research methodology*. Springer Nature, 2022.p9

[5] Barfield, Thomas J. "Afghanistan: A cultural and political history." (2022): 1-456.p29

Bangladeshi mass media too are dependent on foreign news feed for the coverage of the Taliban, Afghan and the withdrawal of foreign troops. Therefore, this study aims to examine how two Bangladeshi newspapers— the Daily Star and the Prothom Alo— have represented the event of the handing over the power of Afghanistan to the Taliban after 20 years of invasion. Samuel P. Huntington has come up with the "prescription of war" [6]against Islam in the name of clash of civilizations presenting the Muslim world as an "ancient rival" [7]Manufacturing an unchanging orientalist notion of "The West versus the Rest" or "Us versus Them" and constructing a particular civilization (i.e., Islam) as a threat is a method of establishing and justifying Western superiority. Media has adopted, produced and replicated the images of Islam and Muslims in favor of Western governments, businesses and ideologies[8], and justified their oppression (Kellner, 2010).

In Afghanistan, Taliban has re-emerged in the same position of power after 20 years under a treaty between the invading powers led by the US and the representative of the Taliban. The surrendering of power of the United States ended their failed promises to establish peace, democracy and human rights by the invading powers. Therefore, how the issue was covered in the mass media of the country needs to be examined. It will examine the coverage of two Bangladeshi mainstream newspapers— the Prothom Alo (PA) and the Daily Star (DS). Both are the highest circulated newspapers in Bangladesh published in Bangla and English respectively.

The study aims to examine how these media outlets discursively construct the image of various actors involved in the issue and how they legitimate the invading powers against the rights of Afghan people. There are arguments that the Western media prefer to preserve the Western political agenda that

[6] Gurevitch, Michael. "Taken by Storm: The Media, Public Opinion, and US Foreign Policy in the Gulf War." (1995): 445-447.

[7] Samuel, Huntington. "The clash of civilizations." *Foreign Affairs* 72.3 (1993): 22-49.p27

[8] Fowler, Roger. *Language in the News: Discourse and Ideology in the Press*. Routledge, 2013.p12

legitimate the Western authority across the world (Said, 1978, 1980; Richardson, 2004). How Bangladeshi mass media represent a foreign issue associated with invasion of a foreign land is yet to examine. Albeit Bangladeshi mass media serve the elite agenda that perpetuate elite authority inside society[9][10] but dehumanize ordinary people living inside society. Therefore, this study would be a bridge between the gap in literature— how Bangladeshi newspapers represented the image of invading foreign troops in their coverage. It needs to be noted that there was no correspondent stationed in Afghanistan from the DS or PA at that moment. Therefore, how these newspapers perceived the issue in their coverage in editorials and news needs to be examined.

A Taliban and the World Power

In the mid-twentieth century, the soil of Afghanistan saw the warmth of the cold war between the United States and the Soviet Union through the invasion of the Soviet Union in 1979. The foreign intervention with the communist governments' ongoing reformations at home appeared as a threat to both the traditional and religious values and political conservatism of the people of Afghanistan (Nojumi, 2008). Therefore, the people of Afghanistan came to resist the Soviet invasion as a "means of self-defense" (Nojumi, 2008). The response of the United States was to form an alliance with other Islamic countries and support the resistance group called Mujahedeen with money, arms, training and placing the responsibility directly under Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) to defeat Soviet Union and to ensure the victory of USA in Afghanistan[11].

[9] Kabir, Shah Nister. "SMALL TALK, BIG ISSUE: DEVELOPMENT, SILENCE AND THE ELITE AGENDA IN A BANGLADESHI NEWSPAPER." *Journal of Development Communication* 34.2 (2023).p11

[10] Kabir, Shah Nister, and Sharifah Nurul Huda Alkaf. "Selling crime, criminals and commercializing social panic: Three case studies in Bangladesh." *International Journal of Criminal Justice Sciences* 13.1 (2018).p56

[11] Bashar, Iftekharul. "Rise of the Taliban in Afghanistan." *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses* 13.4 (2021): 19-24.p20

The Mujahideen's conquest over foreign invasion of the Soviet Union came with a wave of hope for Afghanistan that turned to despair with the outbreak of civil war in the land that had just suffered a decade long disastrous war.

The formation of Taliban (Pashtu for "Knowledge seekers or students") was a response towards the vacuum of power and anarchy with the avowed goal "to reassert central control by some form of state structure[12]when Kabul's streets turned to a battle ground between warlord-led cans and gunmen while roadside robberies, rape, murder, taxation were very common (Johnson, 2021). The terrorist incidents of September 11, 2001 (here after 9/11) brought Afghanistan and Taliban in the focus once again after the Soviet withdrawal. The US demanded al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden to be handed over to the US and the Taliban refused to do so.[13]argues that the US discovered the women's right violation in Afghanistan suddenly which was then under the curtain of the economic interest of the US to ensure the contract of an oil pipeline through Afghanistan to reach Caspian Sea oil. Gradually, the Afghan people witnessed another foreign invasion which overthrew the government of Afghanistan (i.e. the Taliban regime) in the name of "Operation Enduring Freedom". The former freedom fighters became human rights violators, fundamentalists and terrorists overnight through the politician's speech and mass media.

B War, Conflict and Media

There is a popular saying that in a war, truth is the first casualty. It is evident from the courses of history that winning a war always involves a package of propaganda. Each war involves different types of propaganda in different stages in the development of war such as, pre-war propaganda to get prepared and mobilize the army sometimes with a manufactured cause to

[12] Johnson, Chris, and Jolyon Leslie. *Afghanistan: The mirage of peace*. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2009.p44

[13] Malinkina, Olga V., and Douglas M. McLeod. "From Afghanistan to Chechnya: News Coverage by Izvestia and the New York Times." *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 77.1 (2000): 37-49.p40

serve vested interest; during the war propaganda appears to encourage the soldiers and citizens and confuse the opponents; and post-war war propaganda to justify the attack, destruction, human rights violation or loss and write glorifying history[14]; Tumber and Palmer, 2004).

In the context of war, united political elites in favor of an attack increases the possibility of biased patriotic reporting while conflicting positions of the divided political elites contributes to the careful and comprehensive coverage of war (Hallin, 1986; Bennett and Paletz, 1994). War correspondents neglect independence and critical stance and instill more patriotism to show solidarity with 'our troops'. In these circumstances, war reporting is characterized with biasness, over dependence on strictly restricted and one-sided sources, ignored areas of coverage, censorship and self-regulation. For example, in the case of Gulf war, framing of the war was constructed with military and technical language that made people evaluate the success of the war on the basis of 'technological precision of weapon' not on human rights and values, environmental damage or US foreign policy (Allen et al. 1994: 280).

Patriotic theme of media's representation with language of euphemism and metaphors characterizing the military operations created an environment of reinforcing the suppression of dissent views and democratic discussions to make Americans cope with the consequences of the war (Allen et al., 1994[15].

According to Guy Gugliotta of the Washington Post, access to the story in the time of gulf war became a bigger problem than strict censorship by the administration (Dennis et al. 1991: 29). Top 15 experts accounted for 36 percent (545 of 1531) of all the quotations and discussions on television and

[14] Nord, Lars W., and Jesper Strömbäck. "Making sense of different types of crises: A study of the Swedish media coverage of the terror attacks against the United States and the US attacks in Afghanistan." *Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics* 8.4 (2003): 54-75.p60

[15] Jasperson, Amy E., and Mansour O. El-Kikhia. "CNN and Al Jazeera's media coverage of America's war in Afghanistan." *Framing terrorism*. Routledge, 2004. 113-132.p115

the most highly quoted expert was Admiral William Crowe, former chair of the Joint Chief of Staffs, with a total of 280 quotes in print or on television (Dennis et al. 1991: 43). Very few sources existed outside of the U.S. military's Joint Information Bureau and other than the Pentagon's version of narratives [16]; Allen et al. 1994).

The Gannett Report quoted Lawrence Grossman, former president of NBC News and PBS saying that, "The press was held captive by the Pentagon''. Before the invasion, a young Kuwaiti girl named Nayirah appeared and gave testimony in the congress about her terrifying experience of how Iraqi soldiers were killing babies after the invasion of Iraq. Though the claim was not proven through independent investigations by media houses or humanitarian organizations, the testimony broadcasted across the country to sell the war to the public through altering public opinion. Later it is revealed that the girl is the daughter of the Kuwaiti Ambassador to the U.S., Saud Nasir al- Sabah who didn't have any experience of the war[17]. But the narrative was sold out already portraying Saddam Hossain as Adolf Hitler and justified an attack by the US. The invasion of Gaza is another example where US President Joe Biden himself has reciprocated and even clarified the propaganda of '40 beheaded babies' which is later denied by the White House officials (Business Insider, 2023). But the hatred has sparked already and furnished a ground for genocide against Gaza.

C Taliban **and Afghanistan in Media**

The geo-political position of the country and the continuous power game of the world powers in the land has shaped the perception about Afghanistan as well as Taliban over time. An analysis on the portrayal of Afghanistan in the leading US media, Newsweek and Time magazines suggests that the coverage of Afghanistan was mostly negative and the

[16] Fowler, Roger. *Language in the News: Discourse and Ideology in the Press*. Routledge, 2013.p10

[17] Hartenian, Larry. *George W Bush administration propaganda for an invasion of Iraq: The absence of evidence*. Routledge, 2021.p10

negative coverage is more than nine times higher in comparison to the positive coverage. The media represented Afghanistan as an “abode of Taliban and extremism, penitentiary for women, a narcotics den, a center for Islamization, and a safe haven for Al Qaeda and Usama Bin Laden” (Shabir et al., 2011). When the Afghan Mujahideen, however, were fighting meritoriously to defeat Russia and resisting the expansion of communism, American media depicted the war as a holy war and the Mujahideen as freedom fighters; and they were identified as the great ally of the West. After the defeat of Russia in Afghan soil, Mujahideen and their service were no longer relevant or required and the devastating civil war in Afghanistan was disregarded by mainstream media. Though the emergence of Taliban contributed to the unification of warlords and established peace through implementing law and order, the magazines were full of distorted type of story about Taliban regime with bitter criticisms describing them as “uncivilized, rustic barbaric and ferocious creatures'' (Shabir et al., 2011).

Canadian newspaper headlines in relation to the war in Afghanistan and Iraq have revealed the construction of image and framing of the “enemy” in the dominant discourse of media Newspapers of many political affiliations across the U.S., Europe and Australia generate with remarkable consistency, journalistic framing of the enemy as a hunted animal. Suspected terrorists, enemy military and political leaders and, ultimately, entire populations are metaphorically linked to animals, particularly to prey. Canadian newspaper headlines echo this framing, particularly in two of its most persistent strains: the enemy as repugnant animal and the enemy as pestilential. Media reports on the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq are punctuated by language expressing notions of pursuit, capture and entrapment via a particular vocabulary that relies on animal-related metaphors such as “hunt”, “trap”, “snare”, “net” and “corral”. Terrorists, thus, are “caught in a trap” while the enemy “scurries” for cover or “slithers” out of reach. Neutral terms such as “search” or “look for”

have been almost entirely replaced by the dominant hunting model, as in repeated references to the "hunt for terrorists" (Steuter & Wills, 2009).

Analysis of New York Times by Elham et al. [18]found demeaning language to portray the Taliban as well as to demoralize Afghan government and security forces through their form of coverage. The prominent media made the Afghan people responsible for the devastating war that erupted on their soil by foreign invasion. Besides, in the Spanish press, the global concept of security threat is used to frame the War on Terror, emphasizing the relationship between Taliban and Al-Qaeda (Herrero, 2021).

Nadeem and Khan (2017) studied 352 editorials of two Pakistani newspaper, Dawn and The Nation which revealed that Taliban was mostly presented in a negative manner regardless of the alignment of the media as left or right and the approach was noticed to be similar with the stance of the government of Pakistan as well as its foreign policy which considered Taliban as a terrorist group. An analysis on editorial treatment of Taliban in the elite English newspapers of India and Pakistan (The Hindu and Dawn) has found the media framing of Taliban depends on the context of foreign policies of South Asia "having important stakes in the conflict-ravaged Afghanistan[19]

D Orientalism: Representing the Other

Edward Said[20]argues that the West maintains that they are superior to the non-West and they impose their good image through media, history writing, literature, paintings and many other forms of communication. The imagined superiority of the West discursively dehumanized the Orient [21]that has justified and legitimated Europe and European culture to 'manage and produce the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically,

[18] Elham, Ahmad Zia, Rahmatullah Haand, and S. Azizullah. "War and Peace Journalism: Representation of Conflict on Afghan Soil through Global Media." *NAAR Journal* 4.7 (2021): 67-83.p70

[19] Van Dijk, Teun A. *News analysis: Case studies of international and national news in the press*. Routledge, 2013.p45

[20] Said, Edward W. "2003. Orientalism." (1978).p55

[21] Creswell, John W. *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research*. pearson, 2015.p30

scientifically and imaginatively'[22]. The discourse has manufactured two distinct races; dominant (Occident) and subject (Orient) and honored the Occident or the West as superior over the other who assert their knowledge on the subject race more than themselves and thus possesses the domination or authority or the right to rule over the Orient, declining the orient's claim of self-government.

Orientalism can be discussed and analyzed as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient— dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient.[2324] notion of discourse has been applied in the study of orientalism by Said through the concept of knowledge and power and depicted clearly how the invasion and unjust rule of the West has been considered as a triumph of their knowledge. Developing Western interpretation and Western sources of knowledge and then instilling into consciousness through hegemonic filters has converted the man-made biases of binary differences into universal and objective truths. Knowledge plays a role for the vindication of the Western imperialism, constructing a dominated race whose land can be occupied, whose external and internal affairs can be controlled rigidly and whose blood and treasure can be put at disposal of Western control.

Occident or West (Us)	**Orient (the Other)**
Modern/developed	Primitive
Rational	Emotional
Masculine/powerful	Feminine/vulnerable
White/pure	Colored/stained
Civilized	Barbaric
Humane	Aberrant

[22] Van Dijk, Teun Adrianus. *Prejudice in discourse*. Amsterdam: Benjamins, 1984.p55

[23] Van Dijk, Teun Adrianus. *Prejudice in discourse*. Amsterdam: Benjamins, 1984.p22

[24] Barker, Martin, and Anne Beezer. "Glasgow University Media Group, The Bad News Books." *Reading Into Cultural Studies*. Routledge, 2003. 72-88.p77

Superior	Inferior

Table 1: Manufactured binary differences between the West & the Orient.

Methodology

As mentioned, this study comprises the news and editorials about Afghanistan published in the front, editorial, international and back page of the two leading daily newspapers of Bangladesh the DS and the PA from 8 August to 7 September, 2021— a three-week data-set. Taliban received the power of Afghanistan government on August 15, 2021 and the evacuation of the US was accomplished on August 30, 2021. Therefore, this study considers one week prior to the assuming the power of Taliban and one week after leaving of the foreign troops from Afghanistan. It would help to understand how these newspapers perceive the evacuation of the foreign troops and handing over the power to the Taliban.

Both quantitative and qualitative research methodology have been adopted to analyze data. Qualitative approach (i.e., discourse analysis) is the core of the research along with quantitative search that would support the qualitative part. Discourse is a way of representation of the world (physical, social, psychological) which differs on the basis of "how social events are represented, what is excluded or included, how abstractly or concretely events are represented, and how more specifically the processes and relations, social actors, time and place of events are represented"[25]. In other words, discourse is socially consequential with ideological effects which give rise to power as well as produce and reproduce unequal power relationships through the approach of positioning characters and representing events[26] Discourse analysis studies the way social-power abuse, inequality and domination are enacted, confirmed, reproduced, legitimated, and challenged or resisted by text in the political and social context. By taking an explicit position, discourse analysis wants to "understand, expose, and ultimately

[25] Fairclough, Norman. *Analysing discourse*. Vol. 270. London: routledge, 2003.p41

[26] Wodak, Ruth. "Critical discourse analysis." *The Routledge companion to English studies*. Routledge, 2014. 302-316.p305

challenge social inequality" through "asking questions about the way specific discourse structures are deployed in the reproduction of social dominance" (van Dijk, 2001). Dominant groups dictate discourse structures (such as topics, arguments, lexical choice, metaphor, and rhetorical figures) that affect specific to general knowledge of a large group of people and contribute to generalizing stereotypes, biasness or prejudices (van Dijk, 1984). The ability to control the minds and actions of people is the reflection of power of dominant groups (symbolic elites) over discourse formation[27].

Media, as a social institution, is a source of power that can decide whether a topic will be covered or remain hidden or banned[28][29]; Van Dijk 1988). Publishers and editors convey the power to give priority to certain forms of representation (negative or positive) and make other contradictory images silent (Van Dijk, 1993). News is not the reflection of reality but a product shaped by political, economic and cultural forces [30]which is a collection of available discourses. In this way, controlling people's mind and action (e.g., intentions, knowledge, attitudes, plans, opinions, ideologies) through controlling textual structures and context is a fundamental way to establish and reproduce dominance and hegemony (Van Dijk, 2001).

Finding and Discussion

A Quantitative Findings

Within the time period, the PA has published 128 news, 2 editorials and 64 photos which has outnumbered the DS that has published 119 news, 5 editorials and 48 photos. With some slight scattering points, the trend of publishing total number of contents daily in the newspapers mainly follow or reciprocate each other. The DS has published more than double editorials in

[27] Van Dijk, Teun A. "Elite discourse and racism." *Newbury Park, CA* (1993).p30
[28] Gans, Herbert J. *Deciding what's news: A study of CBS evening news, NBC nightly news, Newsweek, and Time*. Northwestern University Press, 2004.p15
[29] Lerman, Claire Lindegren. "Dominant discourse: The institutional voice and control of topic." *Language, image, media* (1983): 75-103.p80
[30] LaMay, Craig. "The media at war: the press and the Persian Gulf conflict." (1991).p13

comparison with PA. On the other hand, PA has published more news in the front page (PA: 32, DS: 27) and international page (PA: 96, DS: 83) though the difference is not too far. Besides, the DS has published 9 news stories on the back page when PA didn't publish a single story in that page which is considered second position on the basis of importance to Bangladeshi readers.

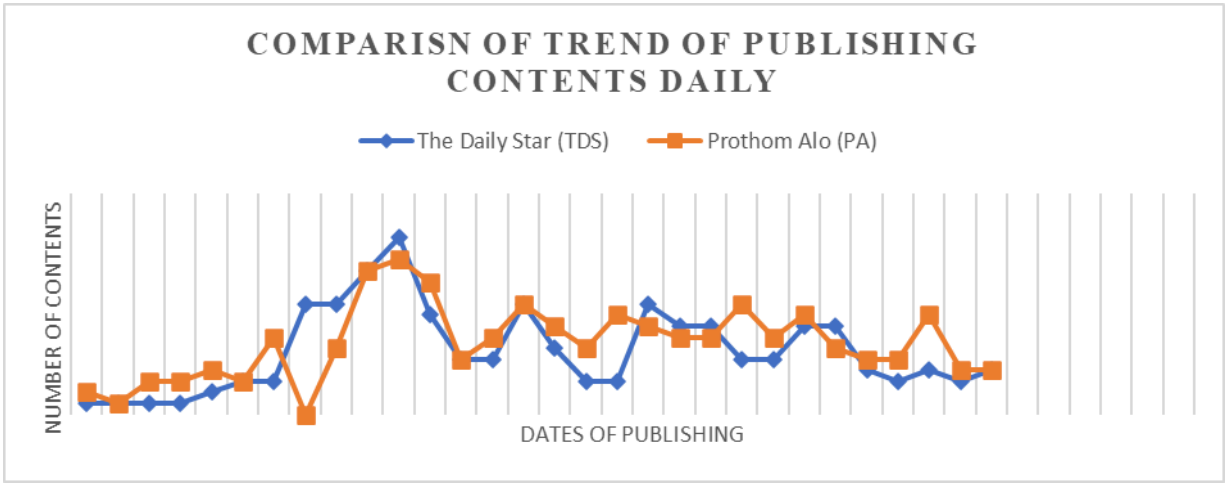
COMPARISN OF TREND OF PUBLISHING CONTENTS DAILY
The Daily Star (TDS)
Prothom Alo (PA)
NUMBER OF CONTENTS
DATES OF PUBLISHING

Figure 1: Figure 1: Comparison of trend of publishing content daily.

B Qualitative Analysis

1. Preference to Foreign Invasion, Objection to Freedom

The DS and PA have continuously been presenting arguments against the withdrawal plan from the very beginning with the formation of speculation of "Afghanistan's being heaven for the terrorists" (DS, 18 August, 2021) if US led troops end the decades long war. According to the narratives of these newspapers, the US's military presence is necessary to keep Taliban and 'terrorist' organizations away from power as the void left by US forces will be filled with Taliban taking control of Afghanistan (Taliban to give Qaeda covert support: analysts: DS, 17 August). The language and arguments presented in the newspapers contributed to legitimate the two decades earlier devastating foreign invasion. Both of the newspapers justified the invasion describing it as a 'response'; as the

invasion was "…in response to the Taliban giving sanctuary to Al Qaeda" (DS, 18 August, 2021) or "sparked by 9/11" as the attack of 9/11 was "…planned from Afghanistan" (DS, 17 August, 2021) and all these circumstances4 'prompt' (PA, 17 August, 2021) the West to invade Afghanistan. The newspapers have often ignored the word 'invasion' and preferred to use softer and neutral versions of words as 'involvement' or 'operation' or just simply described as two decades long 'presence' (DS, 15 August, 2021) of the United States in that region. The representation depicts the newspapers agenda in this issue that they prefer Afghanistan to be ruled by foreign rulers (e.g., US and its' allies) than its own people.

Both newspapers have rendered a good amount of coverage on daily basis on the criticism of the US President Joe Bidens' decision on the withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan identifying it as a serious mistake (US troops pullout a 'mistake': DS, 14 August) or how the "embarrassing" (Republican Senator Mitch Mcconnel, DS, 14 August) step will hamper the image of the West as the superior power group (such as, headlines on 18 August in the DS as 'Shameful for the West', 'NATO should learn lessons'). The newspapers have given a good number of coverages to the evacuation process through providing images of chaos, crowd and blast at the airport to formulate narrative against evacuation and lengthening the foreign invasion. One-fourth of the total photographs published by the dailies are about the evacuation process. These newspapers quoted the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, Boris Johnson as saying: "Afghanistan is once again becoming a breeding ground of terror…Nobody should bilaterally recognize the Taliban as government… There will be a new administration very shortly" (DS, 16 August). Sounds familiar as the declaration of the historic war in Afghanistan on 7 October, 2001 by US President George Walker Bush

who too committed peace and generosity on that declaration in their fight with terror from America and their allies to the “oppressed people of Afghanistan” (White House Archive, 7 October, 2001). Afghanistan has witnessed death, destruction, displacement with each year record breaking number of bombs dropping on them. The pattern of the Western leaders’ words and actions clearly reflects their orientalist ideology as they comprehend their superior position in power and knowledge to dominate others (specially the historical orient) and reject their right to self-government or autonomy through controlling their internal affairs, occupying their land, acquiring the ‘others’ labor and resources as well as establishing authority over text, sources of knowledge of the others. The same ideology and agenda are reflected in the representation of the contents of the DS and PA as the elite newspapers of the South Asian country have surrendered to the elite Western agenda through the formation of an ‘Other among Us’ to isolate, criminalize and subjugate the cause of Afghans to accomplish their own interest.

2. Weaponization of Women and Human Rights to Legitimate Invasion

After Taliban’s conquering Kabul, the United Nations chief Antonio Guterres warned of "chilling" curbs on human rights and mounting violations against women and girls as well as appealed to UN Security Council to "use all tools at its disposal" to suppress a global terrorist threat from Afghanistan and guarantee respect for human rights (‘Afghanistan is spinning out of control’: DS, 17 August). The US declared two conditions on recognizing the Taliban government— one of them is to show respect to the basic rights of humans. Therefore, the term human rights have always played a game changing role in the issue of Afghanistan from the invasion to the withdrawal. Women’s rights are a significant, sometimes more powerful portion of the rights politics. The declaring the attack of

9/11 as the legitimating factor, stating the saintlike objective as establishing human rights and ensuring rights of the oppressed women in the orient offered the invader a moral face to justify the occupation and sustain the position of superiority.

That's why for the very first time a presidential wife, Laura Bush has given the entire radio address alone saying the war on terror as "A fight for the rights and dignity of women" (Los Angeles Times, 18 November, 2001). Moreover, in the media landscape, Afghan women's presence flooded the US media (e.g., New York Times, Washington Post) after 11 September 2001 shifting from the former invisible position to justify the bombings on Afghanistan (Kumar and Stabile, 2005). In the representation of the two newspapers of this study, the issue of women in the photos has got the third largest coverage. Of all photos, 20% are about or involved with women in the DS and it is 22.06% in PA, 2.06% more than the former one. Among the different forms of coverage of women, the DS has given the highest coverage to the protests of women (36%) and the second largest coverage is conferred to the evacuation of women (22%). The coverage of PA is not very different from the DS, a slight shift in the position with approximately the same quantity of coverage. In PA, the highest coverage is given to the process of evacuation of women (40%) and then women's protest (20%).

Both of the newspapers have shown the same quantity of symbolic image with hijab or veil. The prominent two forms of coverage (i.e., women protest and evacuation) which comprise about 60% of the whole coverage of women works as a representation of the condition of women, rights violation, insecurity under the upcoming Taliban regime and so on. Moreover, the symbols of Islam (Hijab, veil) are incorporated with the condition of women and rights violations through the photos. Besides, when the Taliban started to

conquer provinces and advanced rapidly, the newspapers were frequently publishing reports with the statistics of number of deaths, wounded and displaced civilians, Afghan forces from the past 6 months but the statistics of the dead, wounded, displaced people because of the invasion of United States led troops remain under the curtain. In this way, the newspapers have constructed a strong ground for the invading powers to occupy as well as justify the occupation

US president George W. Bush announced the military operation in Afghanistan with the message of peace and the world power's historical contribution for peace that later cost with 241000 deaths as a direct result of war among which 71,344 were civilians and hundreds of thousands more died due to hunger, disease and injury caused by the demolishing war and 2.7 million new refugees with another four million internally displaced, according to an estimation by United Nations (Haddad, 2021). Afghan women, whose rights were declared one of the main concerns of the west and point of criticism for the Taliban behind the incursion, paid a high price with 3000 deaths and 7000 casualties in a decade of the war. Following the US administration's narrative, the media justified the invasion and the acclaimed freedom fighters of Carter and Regan administration became evil terrorists from whose darkness American soldiers came to make Afghan people free. The invasion of the "Friend to the Afghan people" (The White House Achieve, 2001) came with the consequence of making Afghanistan "one of the deadliest places in the world to be a child" (Haddad, 2021) with 7792 dead bodies of children within ten years of the war, according to the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan. Moreover, the war crimes of US troops in Afghanistan were leaked and published by WikiLeaks in

2010-2011, and then the founder Julian Assange faced trial and imprisonment for exercising his rights as a journalist.

3. Terrorists vs. Savior

   The DS and PA have used similar type of naming or lexical choices for the Taliban as “Islamic fundamentalist”, “hardline Islamist militant movement”, “militant group”, “terrorist”, “militia”, “insurgent fighters”, “religious obscurant”, “armed Islamist group”, “extremist group” or a group “affront to Afghans' human rights and freedom of speech” and so on. On the other hand, the invader groups are called such as “foreign troops”, “US-led forces”, “US militaries” etc. Moreover, the use of verbs shows what the newspapers want the readers to know about the function of a particular subject or character. Lexical choices here are the examples of what the group’s role according to the newspapers to manufacture the character in audiences mind. The lexical choices for the Taliban are as such, they- “capture”, “kill or claim responsibility of death”, “assassinate”, “seize”, “kidnap”, “isolate”, “warn”, “patrol”, “raid”, “harass”, “beat”, “loot” and many more. In this way, the DS and PA has used militarized and violent words even the words related to religious identity to characterize their affirmed “terrorist” group. On the other hand, the selected newspapers rarely use the words as invasion or occupation to describe the United States’s role in this region. Instead of using words like invasion or occupation or war, the newspapers use words as “operation”, “involvement”, “presence” etc.

The lexical choice, name-calling and metaphors used by the two newspapers has established the justification of the invasion by constructing Taliban as the invader, outsider and the US as the savior. The evident is also found in the photo coverage where the coverage of the Taliban was bluntly negative 76.47% in DS and 94.47% in PA (such as with heavy weapons, searching, guarding, patrolling in the public places and causing fear). On the

contrary, the photo coverage of the US army received is 83.33% positive in the DS and 100% positive in PA (such as the army is trying to assist people at Kabul airport in the process of evacuation or providing medical facilities to the evacuees). Moreover, only 1.64% of the published photos are collected from the non-Western news sources or agencies (RTA or Radio Television Afghanistan). PA has collected 98.36% (AFP: 68.85%, Reuters: 29.51%) of its total photos from Western news agencies where the DS collected 100% (AFP: 56.25%, Reuters: 43.75%) of its published photos from the Western agencies. From the advancement of Taliban toward the capital, the newspapers have repeatedly made the readers to construct the former Taliban rule in their mind through phrases like “pariah regime”, “strict interpretation of Islamic law”, “ultra-austere band of Islam”, “strict Islamic rule”, “harsh practices in their imposition of Sharia” and many more phrases and clauses like these (DS, 18 August).

Many stories have been published in that time contains many statements sometimes of the general Afghans’ or politicians’ or experts that is not based on what has happened but on what the person thinks can happen; modal verbs became prominent in the news contents such as Defense Secretary Ben Wallace said, "Of course Al-Qaeda will probably come back,[31] The newspapers constantly reported on how this return of Taliban rule can strengthen the global terrorist network and bell the security alarm again as the “terrorist syndicate is closely involved with Taliban” as stated in the PA on 17 August. The newspapers saw the Taliban in power as the revival of Al Qaeda, claiming the tie is not ended yet.

Michael Rubin, a former Pentagon official and analyst at the American Enterprise Institute think-tank, said "the Taliban were never sincere about cutting ties with Al-Qaeda, nor should we have expected them to be…After all, this isn't a matter of two political or military groups cutting ties, but

[31] Rasul, Azmat, Barbara C. Robinson, and Stephen D. McDowell. "The Taliban factor: conflict in Afghanistan and elite South Asian newspapers." *The Journal of International Communication* 22.2 (2016): 273-292.p280

rather brother cutting ties with brother and cousin with cousin" (DS, 17 August). A report was published in the PA on 18 August with the headline "Will Afghanistan be a haven for terrorists?" mentioning Afghanistan's former history as "University of terrorism… where people learn killing". Moreover, the concern is repeatedly stated in the editorials of both of the newspapers. In the editorial of PA, it is clearly stated that, "There is no reason for us to be complacent despite the Taliban's promise not to harbor any foreign terrorist group on Afghan soil…We have to be careful that no militant group can rise in Bangladesh on that occasion[32].

DS suggested in its editorial that South-Asia must start its preparation for real-life impacts. "It would unfortunately be safe to assume that the accomplishment of such a sizable feat by the Taliban would morally boost like-minded individuals and organizations throughout the subcontinent to act on their fundamentalist beliefs" (DS, 15 August, 2021). In the same editorial, the DS has emphasized the use of soft power along with the existing practice of hard power to counter and eradicate extremism effectively.

C Dehumanization of the Afghan People

The war on Afghanistan cost 241000 deaths as a direct result of war and hundreds of thousands more died due to hunger, disease and injury and 2.7 million new refugees with another four million internally displaced, according to an estimation by United Nations[33]. The outcome of President Bush's commitment to "fight corruption, improve governance, and jumpstart economies" (The White House Achieve, 2001) in Afghanistan is seen in the 20.8% rise of poverty and more than double production of opium in comparison with the situation before the invasion (Haddad, 2021). In that period, Afghanistan even ranked as the most corrupt country in the world in

[32] Steuter, Erin, and Deborah Wills. "Discourses of dehumanization: Enemy construction and Canadian media complicity in the framing of the war on terror." *Global Media Journal* 2.2 (2009): 7.

[33] Munmun, Tasnim Tabassum. "Islamizing peoples with Afghani-'Fundamentalism'? A Critical Review of Bangladeshi Newspaper." *Indonesian Journal of Islamization Studies* 2.1 (2024): 95-118.p99

2011 with positions ranging from 165 to 180 between 2007-2021 according to an estimation of Transparency International.

The international community's preference, Hamid Karzai's government was characterized with maladministration and corruption[34]and his successor Ashraf Ghani followed the same path who at last has been accused of fleeing with over $150 million[35]in cash belonging to the Afghan people on the verge of the re-emergence of Taliban in the power of Afghanistan in 2021 and it is well known across the world that Ghani is and was selected, supported and sheltered by the Western allies. They couldn't guarantee any sign of democratic process or a corrupted puppet one. Moreover, the end result of the invasion is not as committed as before such as democracy or human rights but huge corruption by the ruling elite selected by and closely associated with the invaders. The invasion has made the Afghans more vulnerable let alone improving human rights.

The destruction that the Afghan people have experienced, the losses of life, wealth and human dignity they have seen and the dreams that have snatched from them since the occupation were clearly overlooked, overshadowed, ignored and dehumanized in the newspapers' coverage. Moreover, the unethical invasion and the killing of millions of people by the occupants is established, legitimated and well accepted in the coverage of these newspapers. When the USA failed to establish what it claimed before the invasion, left the country destroyed in 20 years and failed to predict the outcome, they found the victims to criticize. Biden bluntly blamed their own manufactured puppet government of Afghanistan along with the ill-paid, ill-treated Afghan army. Joe Biden has accused that Afghan defense forces have shown little appetite for that fight and, "…in their tens of thousands,

[34] Storey, John. *Cultural theory and popular culture: An introduction*. Routledge, 2021.p13

[35] Shabir, Ghulam, Dr Shahzad Ali, and Dr Zafar Iqbal. "US mass media and image of Afghanistan: Portrayal of Afghanistan by Newsweek and Time." *South Asian Studies* 26.1 (2020).p44

have been laying down their arms -- only for the Taliban to immediately pick them up". Biden urged that "Afghan leaders have to come together. They have got to fight for themselves." "American troops cannot and should not be fighting in a war and dying in a war that Afghan forces are not willing to fight for themselves.[36] How many more generations of America's daughters and sons would you have me send to fight Afghans - Afghanistan's civil war, when Afghan troops will not?" Biden asked. "After 20 years — a trillion dollars spent training and equipping hundreds of thousands of the Afghan National Security and Defense Forces, 2,448 Americans killed, 20,722 more wounded, and untold thousands coming home with unseen trauma to their mental health[37]. Therefore, the story of the Afghan war has become mainly stories of Afghan governments' corruption, the Afghan military's surrendering with no resistance and sacrifices of the invaders in 20 years of their occupation. Newspapers' coverage has forgotten the main sufferers here, the Afghan people and portrayed a clean and heroic image of the invaders. The reality of brutality and devastation of the war on Afghan people has been suppressed behind all the blaming, name-calling and dehumanization projects.

Conclusion

This study aims to examine the representation of the handing over of the power of Afghanistan to the Taliban in two Bangladeshi newspapers— the DS and the PA; and how these two newspapers have constructed various actors associated with the issue of Afghanistan— handing over the power and evacuation of the invading troops. Both newspapers largely provided photographs of protesting Taliban by women, evacuation of women and Muslim religion-based cloths— hijab and burqa, for example. It may be because these newspapers publish under a similar ownership. One may

[36] Pandey, Onkareshwar, and Susmita Saurav. "Big Data: The Game-Changer for Digital Journalism." *Handbook of Digital Journalism: Perspectives from South Asia*. Singapore: Springer Nature Singapore, 2024. 289-299.p33

[37] Gerstenzang, James, and Lisa Getter. "Laura Bush addresses state of Afghan women." *Los Angeles Times* 18 (2001).

think, as there was no correspondent stationed in Afghanistan; and these newspapers had to depend on the Western sources, therefore, the negative news coverage in these newspapers is not their responsibility per se. Nonetheless, there are examples[3839]that the negative arguments against an issue can be opposed in the editorial coverage. In these newspapers, the editorials, however, also promoted a negative perception against the Taliban. The image of the foreign invading soldiers— for example, the US army received a positive image, in contrast. Humanitarian crises of the Afghan people and the dire situation of life under the devastating invasion were almost absent in these newspapers. The coverage given to the issue of women by both newspapers reflect the US media's project of justifying invasion in the name of saving women and human rights. Both newspapers have criticized US troops withdrawal and repeatedly tried to justify the 20 years long brutal invasion in Afghanistan through manufacturing the concept of security threat. The process of dehumanization and absence of the crisis of Afghans and attempt of glorifying the invaders has been clearly understood by their representation. Therefore, the newspapers have successfully served the Western agenda through its editorial policy.

Because of religious affiliation, Taliban has become a part of name calling— e. g., "Islamic fundamentalist", "hardline Islamist militant movement", "religious obscurant", "armed Islamist group". It is not that the Taliban came to the country forcefully as the handling of the power was accomplished after a deal between two parties; the US and the Taliban under Doha Accord. This is the evidence of the defeat of the foreign troops and failure of their leaders to establish whatsoever they wanted to do in Afghanistan. In their rhetorical speech, the invaders frequently argued that they came to Afghanistan to establish the rights of women, of ordinary Afghan

[38] Kabir, Shah Nister. "The Muhammad cartoon controversy in New Zealand newspapers." *Journal of Arab & Muslim Media Research* 14.1 (2021): 143-156.p160

[39] Kabir, Shah M. Nister J. *New Zealand Media Constructions of Islam and Muslims: An Analysis of Selected Newspapers Between 2005-2006*. Diss. University of Otago, 2014.p2009

citizens and to establish democracy inside the Afghan nation. Nevertheless, the irony is that all through the way they unconditionally backed a government that was morally and ethically wrong. Surprisingly, the US and allies stepped in Afghanistan as invaders specially after the incident of 9/11 that killed about 3000 US citizens. After so many years, these newspapers have never perceived the US or its allies as invaders in their coverage. Therefore, the lexical choices we observe, the metaphor they use, the adjective they prefer in identifying Taliban becomes Islamist terrorists, Islamic fundamentalist, hardline Islamist militant etc. In contrast, the foreign troops received the hero images despite they occupied Afghanistan unethically for 20 years.

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